

A Note on the Original Text of "Beauty and the Beast"

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A NOTE ON THE ORIGINAL TEXT OF 'BEAUTY AND THE BEAST'

In January 1957 the Houghton Library at Harvard added to its shelves a seemingly obscure, well-bound work in two volumes entitled *Le Magasin des enfans*, by Madame Le Prince de Beaumont. In its day the *Magasin* was popular throughout Europe.¹ This edition, hitherto unknown, of the *Magasin*, contains one of the most famous of all fairy tales, 'La Belle et la Bête' ('Beauty and the Beast'). The Houghton Library copy is dated 1756, one year earlier than any other recorded copy. So far as I could ascertain there has been no other first edition known with the exception of the later one of 1757. This edition is mentioned in catalogues, but it is not readily available. Neither the British Museum, the Bibliothèque Nationale, the Library of Congress at Washington, nor the Harvard College Library is in possession of a 1757 copy. Lanson's *Bibliographie de la littérature française* and the authoritative Gumuchiun bibliography of children's books, while not indicating any location, do mention the existence of a first (1757) edition. In view of the unavailability of early copies, it is all the more fortunate that the Houghton Library could secure this probably unique (1756) copy.²

The Houghton Library copy was purchased in Paris and brought to Harvard as a gift of Georges L. Lincoln, Class of 1895. The two volumes are leather-bound and measure 14 by 12 cm. with an ex-libris: 'From the Library of Lady Robert Manners.' The title-page of the *Magasin* reads as follows:

Magasin | des | enfans, | ou | dialogues | entre une sage gouvernante | et | plusiers de ses élèves de la première | distinction... | Par | Made Le Prince de Beaumont. | A Londres | se vend chez J. Haberkorn, dans Gerard-Street, Soho, | & chez les libraires de cette ville. | 1756.

Dedicated to 'Paul Petrovitch, petit fils de Pierre Le Grand', the first volume begins with an 'Epître' of ten unnumbered pages signed 'Madame Le Prince de Beaumont'. At that time, and for many years thereafter, she was living in London devoting herself to the education of young women. The *Magasin* itself fills a didactic function. Containing a collection of stories and moralizing dialogues between a group of English children and a governess, called Madame Bonne, who relates the *conte* of 'La Belle et la Bête', this volume apparently disappeared from the book market until its 'rediscovery'. There is little doubt that full credit is to be given to Madame Le Prince de Beaumont for having cast the story in its most enduring form. Her version is the one which has become famous the world over. However, it must be said in all fairness that she was not *the first* to have recorded or written this tale, nor the first to have entitled it 'La Belle et la Bête'; she must have taken title and theme from the *Contes marins*,³ a collection earlier edited in 1740 by another authoress, Madame de Villeneuve. This previous text tells in

¹ See Jan-Ojvind Swahn, *The Tale of Cupid and Psyche* (Lund: CWK Gleerund, 1955), p. 311. [This book is the most comprehensive treatment of 'Beauty and the Beast', together with the myth from which it originates.]

² It is possible that other copies of the *Magasin*, containing 'La Belle et la Bête', may be found. Until such are located, the Harvard copy must be considered the only one extant.

³ La jeune | ameriquaine | et | les contes | marins. | Par Madame de... | A La Haye, | Aux dépens de la Compagnie. | M.DCC.XL. [The name of Madame de Villeneuve, pseudonym of Gabrielle Suzanne Barbot, does not appear anywhere in the volume. Authorship is attributed to her by the editor of the collection, *Cabinet des Fées* (published in Amsterdam in 1785).]

substance the story that Madame Le Prince de Beaumont relates in her 1756 edition; the two versions coincide in plot and incidents; both present a father who loses his fortune, meets a 'monster' (*la Bête*), and agrees to hand over to him his youngest daughter in order to save his life. The daughter (*la Belle*) lives in the palace of *la Bête* until, after abortive attempts to escape, she agrees to marry him, thus 'disenchanting' him of his animal shape.

Madame de Villeneuve's text is practically unknown, and justly so. Her version is excessively long. It is a cumbersome story of 341 pages, filling two volumes of her *Contes marins*. Madame Le Prince de Beaumont's, on the other hand, is far briefer, told with a remarkable felicity of style, reminiscent of the studied simplicity of Perrault. Her text is only twenty-five pages long in the 1756 edition. While her text is stylistically superior to that of Madame de Villeneuve, it still owes something to her predecessor. In view of the identical titles, similarities of plot, incidents and language, it seems evident that Madame Le Prince de Beaumont's version was inspired from that of Madame de Villeneuve. Given the story as published in the earlier text of 1740, Madame Le Prince de Beaumont condensed the voluminous and rather indigestible text into the masterpiece that we know. Her literary merits are easy to assess: brevity, mastery of style, remarkable handling of the *miraculous* in the supernatural adventure of her heroine, and a controlled ambiguity of tone which explains the mysterious and fascinating power of her story.

It is no wonder, then, if Madame de Villeneuve's story has fallen into oblivion, while Madame Le Prince de Beaumont's version has become *the* version. Her text has become universally accepted, usually without due recognition of her authorship. Apart from its bibliographical inspiration this note is an attempt (more fully carried out elsewhere) to give her her due.¹

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'DÉDOUBLEMENT' IN DOSTOEVSKY AND CAMUS

In the crucial scene of *The Double* Dostoevsky describes a terrified Mr Golyadkin running towards one of the Fontanka bridges, persecuted by his own despairing thoughts and encountering for the first time his own double:

It was striking midnight from all the clock towers in Petersburg when Mr Golyadkin, beside himself, ran out on the Fontanka Quay, close to the Ismailovsky Bridge... the snow, the rain and all the nameless horrors of a raging snowstorm and fog, under a Petersburg November sky, were attacking Mr Golyadkin, already shattered by misfortunes... in spite of all this Mr Golyadkin was almost insensible to this final proof of the persecution of destiny: so violent had been the shock and the impression made upon him, a few minutes before at the civil council's Berendyev's... Mr Golyadkin looked as though he wanted to hide from himself, as though he were trying to run away from himself!... At last Mr Golyadkin halted in exhaustion, leaned on the railing in the attitude of a man whose nose has suddenly begun to bleed, and began looking intently at the black and troubled waters of the canal... all at once he started and involuntarily skipped a couple of paces aside. With unaccountable uneasiness he began gazing about him; but no one was there, nothing special had happened, and yet... and yet he fancied that just now, that very minute, some one was standing near him, beside

¹ For a psychological analysis of both the tale of 'Beauty and the Beast' and the myth of *Cupid and Psyche* consult my article in a forthcoming issue of *Psychoanalysis and the Psycho-analytic Quarterly*.